Winged Serpent Woman, 2004, Maria Taveras

Dragons and Dreams

Evija Volfa Vestergaard

ABSTRACT:

Imagination sparked by the dream-like quality of folk tales makes for a rich source of inner intelligence and wisdom. The author recounts never-before-translated Latvian folk tales about dragons and explores them as the collective dreams of a people. The folktales convey messages from the imaginal realm directly to the unconscious mind, bypassing the potentially crippling logic of the conscious mind. The dream work methods of Carl Jung, James Hillman, Stephen Aizenstat, and Robert Bosnak—active imagination, dialoguing, and embodying—are used to engage with the folk tales to allow for even greater imaginal knowing.

KEY WORDS:

dream image, dragon folktales, wisdom, inner intelligence, imagination and knowing

Introduction

A Latvian folk tale tells us about a dragon with wide pants:

Pūķim ir platas bikses. Biksēs viņš sazog no citiem saimniekiem miežus un pienes savam pieturētājam. Reiz viens pūķis platās bikses tā piebēris ar miežiem, ka tās pārplīsušas, un nu vairs nekad viņš nevarējis labību nest. (Leja, 1993, p. 266)

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> Dragon has wide pants. He stuffs stolen barley from other owners and delivers to its master. Once there was a dragon that stuffed his pants so full of barley that the pants broke and the dragon could not bring grains ever again.

We hear the story and wonder about it. The image of a dragon forms in our mind's eye and asks to be followed. "The image, a subtle animal; the imagination, a great beast, a subtle body, with ourselves inseparably lodged in its belly; . . . imagination, a moving haven of theriomorphic Gods in bestial constellations, stirring without external stimulation within our animal sense as it images its life in our world" (Hillman, 2000, p. 142).

Dragon tales have fascinated people for centuries. They are full of the mystical, the mysterious, the unknown that demands the attention of anyone who is willing to hear the stories. The dragon folk tales of a particular culture are especially fascinating for the people of that culture, as they carry with them the message that the stories are my peoples' and, therefore, mine. Just like we might treasure an old piece of jewelry or a ceramic pot from an archeological site, we treasure our folk tales. They are our great-grandparents' stories, they hold our memories, and, they let us connect to the deepest layers of what we treasure in ourselves. They harbor values that matter for our self-preservation because they speak out from our hearts; because, "experienced through participation; they afford communication with ivisible powers" (Paris, 2006, p. 95)—they communicate the soul.

Folk tales do not show the way life is. They tell a story filled with images that invite our fantasy, our imagination in the same way that our dreams do. Folk tales are like dreams of whole peoples, of entire cultures. Beyond the information that folk tales carry about life in the distant past, when they were told by our great-grandmothers, they may offer wisdom for this day and age too. That is, if we open up for more receptive and imaginative ways of knowing.

In this paper, I will explore images and their messages held in Latvian folk tales about dragons, treating the folk tales as the peoples' dreams. I will approach the tales as dreams, the wisdom of which can be tapped through a "yin"[1] type of inquiry, one of submission to what cannot be known in advance, which holds a value of gaining knowledge not accessible through the more traditional and typical "yang" type of inquiry, characterized by a conscious desire and drive.

I will offer two Latvian folk tales[2] about dragons and then, using the approach described above, I will explore how Carl Jung, James Hillman, Stephen Aizenstat, and Robert Bosnak's methods of dream work could be used to encounter or co-create the wisdom of the tales and dreams. The more receptive types of inquiry, like active imagination (AI), dialoguing and embodying, will be privileged over the more yang type of inquiry of amplification.

The World of Dreams and Folk Tales

The world of dreams and the world of folk tales have common threads. The images presenting themselves to a dreamer or the one listening or telling folk tales may appear ambiguous and, thus, confusing. Attempts at finding meaning by linking a dream or a tale image to real people and events in the external environment may not be fruitful and, in fact, may escalate the confusion. Looking up the meaning of a dream image or an image of a folk tale in a dictionary could reduce the image to a math-like statement, which would render no greater understanding. But the inherent complexity of the dream and folktale images does not mean that they are confused. The multiplicity of meanings that they carry is not the sign of confusion or chaos but rather a rich material that reflects life and world itself—always multiple and ambiguous.

Both—the world of dreams and the folk tales—have blank spots, where clarity seems to escape, and where understanding or memory fails. These spots are those that intrigue us the most and, if we let them, become the places most fertile for fantasy and imaginal knowing. Ginette Paris (2006) wrote about such blank spots or the "holes" in dream-like stories or myths: "All mythological stories contain mysteries, imperfections—'holes' in the narration

which raise questions. But it's in this very imperfection—which, dream-like, doesn't necessarily make connections between events—that trigger for our imagination is sometimes found" (p. 40). Paris also asserted that "myth asks: who are we, what is our story, and what does that mean to us?" (ibid., p. 124). Dreams and folk tales pose similar questions to us. How can one fill in these blank spots or holes; or how can one seek answers to the questions that they pose? Using various reflective methods of dream work, we will explore potential answers in this paper below.

Jung's Approach

During his travel to Africa, Carl Jung[3] observed a large herd of animals crossing a river. He witnessed a primeval movement and saw his own act of observing it as an act of creation: "Man, I, in an invisible act of creation put the stamp of perfection on the world by giving it objective existence" (Avens, 2003 p. 94). For Jung, the observer was the central element in creating the consciousness and the meaning in what the observer encountered. Jung's approach was to give attention to the "manifest content of dream images" (ibid., p. 98). To bring attention to images, Jung used the process of AI, which he believed made the images pregnant with meaning that then came out. Robert Avens (2003) paralleled this way of attending to the images to the Taoist concept of "doing by not doing" or "action through non-action" characterized by "dynamic and highly alert attentiveness" (p. 99). It is that kind of inquiry that Joseph Coppin and Elizabeth Nelson (2005) called a "yin" type of inquiry, which required an attitude of submission without anticipation, planning, or pushing to anything particular on beforehand. Yin inquiry demanded being "receptive to knowledge that seeks us" (p. 11).

A particular case of drawing images that appeared to a 17-year-old girl, Ms. A, after listening to the story about the dragon with wide pants, is an example of "submitting to the knowledge that seeks us" (see Fig. 1). In the yin process of inquiry, images came through Ms. A finding shapes expressed on a paper. What formed on the paper was something previously unknown to both, the one drawing the images and the tale itself that had sparked the fantasy.

Fig. 1 "Dragon With Wide Pants" Drawing by Ms. A

The tale and the drawing by Ms. A carry common elements that make the drawing into an illustration of the story. At the same time, the drawing has elements that have clearly formed in a process of imagination. The dragon in the drawing has beautiful red pants, which are intact, not broken; and contain golden stalks of grain. No grains have been lost. It is also a flying dragon, with blue wings and sharp nails. This image seems to resist the fate of the dragon in the tale that had torn its pants and, thus, lost the ability to do his duty—carry grains. The dragon with the red pants appears to forge its own story with a different ending.

There are many ways to tell a story: by putting emphasis on parts of the story or by elaborating on some aspects that the original tale had "holes" in. Paris (2006) wrote: "There's more than one way to tell our story, and some versions can make us sick. The stories then need to be treated, edited" (p. 46). The new story that the dragon in the red pants transmits does not seem to require treatment. Rather, it has itself become a remedy for the dragon in the tale that is now showing off in nice, new, and sturdy pants, full of golden grain.

The method of AI has been used as the basis for other approaches of dream work, as we will see later. Jung's particular approach combined AI with amplification of the images by which it was followed. In the process of symbolic amplification, the images that sprung up during the AI were "mirrored by association to similar themes that have appeared through the history of humankind" (Chodorow, 1997, p. 12). Jung saw amplifications as healing, as they allowed recognizing seemingly personal problems as archetypal themes—something that others experienced too and problems that could hold associated imaginative remedying stories.

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As opposed to the yin inquiry of active imagination, amplification possesses the elements of "yang"—a more active, driven, and desireful seeking of knowledge by going after answers in sources external to the tale and its own images. One might recollect similar themes read in other books; seen in movies, on TV, internet; or described in dictionaries. A book that I enjoy consulting for my amplifications is The Book of Symbols: Reflections of Archetypal Images (Ronnberg & Martin, 2010). Looking up the entry on dragons, it tells us that dragon, with its "the waterlike nature of the Tao, the way of the universe" (p. 704) was for alchemists their symbol of the process of finding precious metals, which, in fact, worked as their inner process of seeking and molding their truths, their souls. The dreams supplied the alchemists with the images from the unconscious, and the imagination formed them into potentiality and manifested truth. "The uroborus, the self-fertilizing and self-devouring serpent [expressed] the tendency of the unconscious to initiate and sponsor the opus of renewal on its own terms" (ibid., p. 704). The evanescent dragon that moves in and out of the view, showing only parts of itself, is the symbol of an event—an act or insight—that gives birth to itself. Returning back to the drawn image of the beautiful dragon in red pants (with no holes) that sprung forth from the tale of the dragon with wide (torn) pants, one could say that the dragon has been true to its nature—it had initiated its rebirth and its renewal—its nature preserved, but its shape transformed.

Taking the images of Latvian dragon tales and amplifying them to the alchemical uroboric dragon may show the archetypal energy of the image and, thus, the power it holds. It may also allow the one engaging with the dragon image to find remedies for the very personal troubles in the realms of the mystical and numinous collective unconscious. At the same time, the Latvian dragon, with its characteristic personality, would have disappeared, taking with it the insights and wisdom that only it contains. Following a more receptive, yin type of inquiry and sticking to the image,[4] we can avoid that loss. Such approach was advocated for by James Hillman and some of his followers explored below.

Hillman's Approach

James Hillman, being a student of Jung himself and the director of studies at the Jungian Institute in Zurich, was deeply familiar with Jung's ideas and, thus, was able to see new avenues that could be opened to allow imagination to flow with no constriction, not even that which might have been created by looking up images in dictionaries. Hillman (2000) wrote that, "we can amplify the image from within itself, simply by attending to it more sensitively, tuning-in, focusing" (p. 181).

Such tuning-in belongs to the more receptive kind of inquiry. It does not get entangled with the reasoning functions and resembles what Henry Corbin calls "inner vision," which is a mediator "between believing and knowing" (Avens, 2003, p. 3). Avens saw such knowledge to be gnostic—spiritual and esoteric—as it did not aim to "prove or to explain the soul but to transform it" (ibid., pp. 5-6) through images rather than concepts. For Hillman (1978), the symbols found in the amplifications of Jung were closer to concepts of the conscious mind than the images of the unconscious. Therefore, he advocated not for the yang type of desireful drive after the archetypal images of the collective unconscious, but for the yin kind of fantasy dialogues: "First, images evoke, and so they carry more unconsciousness with them. They speak to the unconscious, whereas concepts address the conscious—to use those classical terms. Second, imagistic speech is more therapeutic also because it allows for wider analogies, suggests more implications" (p. 178).

The main aim of this approach is to spark fantasy, imagination, to stir the unconscious. It is not preoccupied with finding any truths. It advocates not for pursuits of some hidden meaning disguised in an image, but rather for restating thoughts, feelings, sensations, and also smells that appear together with images: "I have amplified it by letting it speak in multiple restatements. Restatements serve it best because the image is usually not full enough to our untrained ears that miss undertones and overtones," wrote Hillman (ibid., p. 157). For Hillman, images were not pictures like those in photographs or any other forms to be looked at that engage the facilities of vision alone; rather, they were entire settings, filled with elements that triggered not only what could be seen by eyes, but also heard, smelled, touched, felt emotionally, and dialogued with. Hillman (1978) asserted:

> An image perceived as a picture can tend to become optical and intellectual and distanced. It there, we here. But imagined as a scene, I can get into it; and when imagined as a mood, it gets into me. [. . . image is not] something set before my eyeballs, or even before my eye's mind, since it is something into which I also enter and by which I am embraced. Images hold us, we can be in the grip of an image. Indeed they can be gutsy. (p. 159)

Practitioners of the Jungian approach to dream work (that we are using here to attend to the images of Latvian dragon tales) have been able to take some essential aspects of Jung and Hillman's ideas, such as Jung's bringing together of the opposites—masculine-feminine, body-mind, feeling-thought—and Hillman's (1982) radical reorientation toward soul making, which seeks a variety of answers to questions like "what and who before why" (p. 92). Among the practitioners are Stephen Aizenstat and Robert Bosnak, whose ideas and methods will be explored in the following sections.

Aizenstat's Approach

In his book, Dream Tending: Awakening to the Healing Power of Dreams (2011), Aizenstat built on the approaches of Jung and Hillman. Aizenstat's method of "animating" differed from Jung's method in the way that it did not invite amplifications into other stories or myths. It also differed from Hillman's (1977) method by making Hillman's notion of "personifying" (pp. 1-51) less theoretical. Instead, Aizenstat's method is more practically applicable to

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dialoging with the images of the unconscious. The technique of animation relies on engaging with images in a way one would engage with a person—"a living entity, existing in its own right" (Aizenstat, 2011, p. 23). In a receptive exploration, one is open and awaiting to learn who the image is, rather than what it means, just like in meeting a person we would want to know who she or he is, instead of questioning what she or he means or stands for.

The imaginal knowing that relies on animation asks for these steps that Aizenstat (2011) has laid out in his book and that we can use when engaging with images of the dragon tales: 1. the preparation or entering the realm of living images; 2. working with living images by asking them questions "using vivid and stimulating language" (ibid., p. 37); 3. relating to images as to welcome guests, letting all senses (deep vision, listening, smelling) participate; fourth moving from relationship to revelation through "acceptance, positive regard, and openness" (ibid., p. 46); and, finally, moving from inviting an image to loving it. In Aizenstat's words, the images then begin to open for the life itself to pour through them and "we feel a sense of love and caring" (ibid., p. 58).

Ms. I, a woman in her mid-40s (married; with a grown daughter, a passion for painting and poetry, a love for horses, and doing a day job as an accountant in a small firm), engaged in an animated dialogue with the wide-pants dragon of the folk tale that opened this paper. The description of Ms. I and Dragon's encounter follows.

> Dragon is big, handsome but a bit deflated, perhaps ashamed. He is wearing a pair of Turkish style wide, brown, flax pants with a button-down belt. The pants are torn open their entire lengths on one side. Dragon is really handsome—green, between the hard protrusions in the skin on its back, there are some inconspicuous red gemstones. He resembles a huge lizard standing up on its hind legs. In the background, there is its Master—face slightly swollen, greasy, eyes puffed up, clothes wrinkled, and all sweaty. Master, just having woken up, sulking and peevish, is passing by Dragon standing next to a gray barn building. It is summer; green grass; and apple trees.

Ms. I: Why the hell do you have to bring barley? And why do you wear pants when your skin is so beautiful?

Dragon: But where will I live if I will not have a master? I will be bored; will not know what to do. The pants are uncomfortable. I could use a backpack but it might rub my skin. It would need to be bought in a good tourist shop. I could move to a mountain cave but there are no mountains here. Or perhaps to a swamp? But it would be cold. There is no use of me bringing barley. Master just keeps getting more lazy and neglectful; does not want to do anything himself.

Ms. I: You have a beautiful, shiny tail. Do you take care of it in any special way?

Dragon: No, but I like walking through swamplands. Sundews grow there.

Ms. I: What do you eat?

Dragon: Nothing. Thoughts. Perhaps the energy of human thoughts—the good thoughts—my skin reflects the bad ones.

Ms. I: Don't you think your Master is evil because he makes you steal?

Dragon: It is not so pleasant to steal. But I try not to talk to him.

Ms. I: Why do you choose to stay with him?

Dragon: Would not any other master make me do the same? Dragons usually bring things for their masters.

Ms. I: You could simply guard the house or water garden. Perhaps someone might ask you to bring barley for those who have nothing?

Dragon: I had never thought anything of this sort. I could ask Master. He might think it's a good idea. Perhaps he makes me steal because he hasn't thought of anything else.

Ms. I: Do you know any other dragons?

Dragon: No, but I believe they exist. At times, during nights, swooping sounds of wings can be heard. They remind me of swallows. The sounds are much softer and louder though.

Ms. I: Do you not talk to them?

Dragon: No, but I like to listen to the sound of their wings. Dragons seldom talk.

Ms. I: But you talk now.

Dragon: Only in thoughts. Voice has no sound; it cripples the meaning.

As this dialogue may show, the imaginal and receptive way of inquiry yields a space for Ms. I to converse with the personified Dragon. The key of the dialogue is the creation of a personal story through an attitude "of complete receptiveness to whatever appears, with no preconditions or expectations attached" (Johnson, 1989, p. 168). Robert Johnson would also say that the dialogue serves to establish a conversation among parts of oneself that would otherwise be warring and that this process "bring[s] the conflict to a resolution" (ibid., p. 169). Hillman would likely disagree with Johnson that a resolution, a kind of victory over the disturbed, or a heroic union of opposites is necessary. The heroic union in the traditional Western thinking is the outcome of the generational mother-son battle in which the hero child overcomes the dragon and frees himself from the authoritative clasps of the Mother/repressive authority figure.

In alchemy, the dragon holds the creative ability of Mercury, who devours the one who engages with him and necessitates the need for the struggle to get out of the dragon's belly.

Another way of seeing the dragon and the dialogue with it is through the alchemical lens. In alchemy, the dragon holds the creative ability of Mercury, who devours the one who engages with him and necessitates the need for the struggle to get out of the dragon's belly. Hillman (2005) suggested avoiding literalizing the Western hero story and wrote that the devouring dragon was the alchemist's imagination taking over:

> It is not only in terms of a heroic mother-son battle for which St. George and the Dragon has become the major Western paradigm. In alchemy the dragon is also the creative Mercurius and a figuration (or prefiguration) of the puer. The alchemical hero is devoured by the dragon, or, we would say, imagination takes over. Then comes the activity of discrimination from within the belly where nous separates and makes distinctions within the literalizations of physis, the physically concrete fantasies. This process of discrimination is imagined in alchemy as cutting through the belly of the beast from within. (pp. 117 - 118)

Elaborating on Hillman's thoughts, Aizenstat (2011) wrote that the mercurial movement was also that of Hermes[5]—the messenger connecting the conscious and the unconscious realms and "the human realm with the god realm" (p. 276).

The value of the dialogue of Ms. I with Dragon is in the psychological process that deepens the seemingly apparent to what is less visible. The apparent story of the dragon with wide pants is about an unlucky incident of its pants getting torn, and the dragon not being able to bring any more grains in them. The deepened story, as told by Ms. I, is about Dragon, with talents unrecognized by Master, who has grown more lazy and neglectful. It is also about Dragon who has never asked himself whether what he does is the only way to be. Dragon does what he is used to without thinking whether there is any other more rewarding way of leading its life. The inner vision of Ms. I casts light on the questions about Ms. I's own talents, which may be asking for more recognition, and a reconsideration of whether she is open to a more rewarding way of living.

Perhaps sharing Ms. A's drawing with Ms. I, in which the dragon with torn pants has been re-imagined: high flying, strong, beautiful, dressed in intact red pants, stuffed full of golden grain, might initiate flow of new energies in Ms. I? If that would happen, it could show how sharing of re-imagined folk tales might help us together re-imagine, re-story our lives. That could be a powerful and potentially wonderful thing. Due to the space limitations of this paper, such an exploration will need to be left for future papers.

What we will turn to now are the somatic clues that connect us to the images appearing in the process of imaginative inquiry, allowing us not only to meet the images of the folk tales but also to embody them, thus experiencing their perspective, their point of view. That brings us to the approaches articulated and practiced by Robert Bosnak.

Bosnak's Method

Bosnak, just like other practitioners, recognized that the acts of sensitive tuning-in and focusing led to a "meeting place for the figures that live deep within [oneself]" (Aizenstat, 2011, p. 276); and the fantasy brought what one was unconscious of into the conscience. Kathryn Madden (2008) has offered a great metaphor of fishing to describe this process: "Through our experience of the unconscious, we bridge to a certain reality where we temporarily loose what we know to the unknown and come back to our conscious reality replete with at least a small fishnet of new or unexplored imagery, even though we may not quite be able to explain the experience itself" (p. 132).

Bosnak paid particular attention to the fact that the tuning-in and inner dialogues were often strongly felt experiences, with various somatic responses: racing heart, sweaty palms, pressure in the chest, lightness in the belly, for example. Attending to one's bodily responses of pounding heart, wet palms, troubled breathing, or feeling free in the body were the key to embodied imagination that Bosnak saw as essential for the unfolding of the imaginative knowing. "Embodied imagination," Bosnak (2009) wrote, "is an inversion of the notions of inside and outside" (p. 20).

...the inner states have their own existence that is not controllable by our conscious mind.

For most of us, the inner states have their own existence that is not controllable by our conscious mind. We are not able to control our pounding hearts. There is attention and attending needed to meet the heart as an embodied expression of an inner animal, a real being, just like our conscious ego self. Bosnak described a young woman coming face to face with her powerful feelings embodied in the image of a bull, vibrating with energy, and then taking on the bull just like an actor in a play would fully merge with the role she plays and be able to see everything around through the eyes of the character.

> As Berthe gets closer to the bull, she is pulled into his world . . . As the bull takes possession, it changes the very nature of the space in which Berthe finds herself. What she experiences as her inner life is actually a participation in the presence of the bull . . . . From the phenomenal point of view the bull is an encounter embodied presence behaving like an intelligence alien to Berthe's . . . he presents himself to Berthe like a living being . . . she is being embodied by his particular bull-substance . . . with natural laws of his own. (ibid.)

Through attending to the embodied experiences, some otherwise unconscious visceral knowledge of her own inner power becomes available to Berthe. In the same way, embodied encounters with images of dragon tales may offer a different kind of knowledge than one acquires by reading the tales as material capturing frustrations of common people who vented them in a distant past. The embodying of Fire Dragon of the folk tale Fire Dragon and Money Dragon (see below) by Ms. I offers an example of such imaginal knowing.

> **Uguns pūķis un naudas pūķis**
> Senāk bijuši pūķi, tos varējuši nopirkt Rīgā. Pūķi bijuši divējādi: uguns pūķis bijis sarkans. Tas pasargājis sava īpašnieka ēkas, bet tā ienaidniekiem, ja īpašnieks to gribējis, ēkas nodedzinājis. Mantas un bagātības pūķis bijis pelēks. Kas šādu pūķi iegādājies, tas kļuvis bagāts. Lai pūķi iegūtu, vajadzējis pārdot Velnam dvēseli, nolādēties un neiet baznīcā. Nolādēšanās vārdi: Velns manā sirdī, Velns tavā sirdī, Un Dievs pa logu laukā! (Leja, 1993, p. 266)

> **Fire Dragon and Money Dragon**
> In old days, dragons were bought in Riga.[6] They were of two kinds: the fire dragon was red. It guarded its owner's buildings, but the enemy ones, if the owner wanted so, the dragon burned down. The money and wealth dragon was gray. Whoever bought such a dragon became rich. To buy the dragon, one had to sell one's soul to Devil, curse, and quit going to church. The curse words: Devil in my heart, Devil in your heart, And God out the window!

The drawing of the fire and money dragons below (see Fig. 2) by Ms. A served Ms. I as a visual for the tale that she read in Latvian before stepping into the imaginal space to meet Fire Dragon and to merge with it. Ms. I's experiences follow:

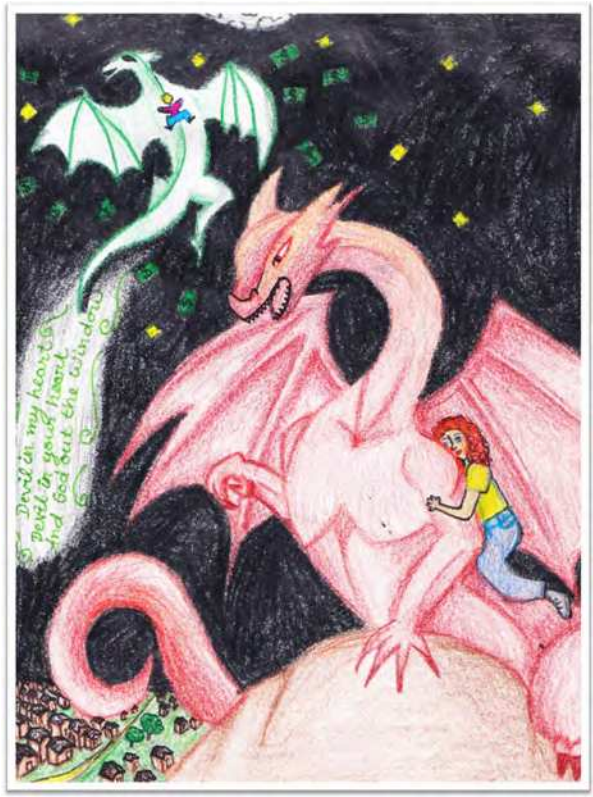

Fig. 2 "Fire Dragon and Money Dragon" Drawing by Ms. A

My heart is pounding. I feel hot; my body is expanding. There is a jittery, anxious, irritated feeling in my belly. My throat is burning with anger. I am Fire Dragon—my body is large, powerful, and strong. I am beautiful: my skin bright red, smooth, and shiny. I look around intently, anxiously for anyone who might sneak up on me. I move like a lightning. Human eye could not notice how I shift from one place to another. I am ready to strike. If I do, it will be the fault not of mine but of the one who comes too close; or who comes unannounced.

I am not evil or intentionally hurtful, I am just defending myself. I demand respect. Respect me; see my powers and I will help you. I am a very cooperative kind of creature just do not think you can command me. I will warm you, carry you, get you to places, but only if you respect my terms just like I respect yours.

Do not dare to poke me. You can only ask me. Know your manners and I will show you mine.

Becoming Fire Dragon herself, Ms. I does not stand back and analyze the situation. She is also not taking control of what is happening. Instead, she identifies her somatic reactions and gets involved in a play, the scenario of which is "full of developments and new understandings about life itself" (Paris, 2006, p. 46). Those are Ms. I's own abilities that speak through the image of Fire Dragon. They announce their intelligence and the abilities greater than those which she is permitted to employ when others direct her life.

This story is not a stranger to many of us, as human life largely takes place within a family, or some social or group environment. Fire Dragon brings out the frustrations, the burning inner fires of constrictions that these groups may impose. The encounter with Fire Dragon also opens up for possibilities of creating a new story that is not sickening; that offers more generative and creative outlets of the energy pent up inside Ms. I. By embodying Fire Dragon, Ms. I may be able to become more attuned to identifying what frustrates her in her immediate life and begin to imagine and enact new and more satisfying arrangements.

Folk tales...transform themselves through the imaginative knowing of those who engage with them...

Conclusion

The dream-like quality of folk tales, with "holes" in understanding or memory, makes for a rich source of imaginal knowing. Active imaginations, with invitation and openness to receptive meetings and to dialoguing with images that emerge from the unconscious, like the dragons in Latvian folk tales, may help "dramatize inner conflicts" as if "they really were" (Paris, 2006, p. 45). When that happens, feelings, whatever those may be: dissatisfactions, anger, passion, or love, do not burn wastefully but live on the conscious imaginal level. Folk tales, the dreams of peoples, do not force explanations or ultimate answers and instead transform themselves through the imaginative knowing of those who engage with them in a receptive, yin, or Tao "doing without doing" way. An inner intelligence, gnostic insight about oneself and everything around, then may be formed, with awareness about what and who, instead of why.

Life itself pours through the dragon tales because they contain images that fascinate us just the same way they fascinated ancient alchemists. Their mystery demands our attention, especially if we treasure them as messengers from our ancestors and from the deep layers of ourselves and let them work on us. They afford communications that harbor values needed for our self-preservation and soul-making because the imaginative inquiry that they spark allows us to move from the surface of what is visible and known to the less visible. Learning about the invisible or the unknown in an imaginal way is also a way filled with deep care for what comes up, for oneself, and extending from there, also the world around.

Endnotes

[1] Coppin and Nelson, 2005, described two types of inquiry: yin and yang. "The yang of inquiry" (p. 11) is desireful and driven with curiosity that seeks to find answers to questions of what, when, and how. The yin type of inquiry requires an attitude of submission to what cannot be known in advance; one that is not possible to anticipate, plan for, drive, or push towards. It demands being "receptive to knowledge that seeks us" (p. 11). The authors compared the yin and yang inquiries to the act of love-making, describing its aspects of pursuing pleasure and allowing oneself to receive it. In the passive, or yin state of knowledge seeking, they argued, the knowledge dwelling in the unconscious depth of the psyche may be accessed and brought into the consciousness. This inquiry required willingness to wait, openness to receive, to entertain, and accept what such experience brought, and the insights that were formed.

[2] Latvian folk tales are short, typically a couple of paragraphs long.

[3] Carl Jung, Swiss psychologist, the founder of analytical psychology, travelled on "Bugishu Psychological Expedition" to East Africa in 1925, with an aim to understand "primitive psychology" through conversations with people of remote tribes.

[4] "Stick to the image," James Hillman advocated, as he considered image to be completely meaningful. His perspective was that the psyche was not in us but that we were in the psyche. Different from Jung, for Hillman images were not in the container of the psyche but they were the psyche. Hillman did not like the notion of amplification as it, in Hillman's mind, did not take the images for what they were in their own right. (Slater, 2012).

[5] Hermes is the Greek god identified with the Roman god Mercury.

[6] Founded in 1201, Riga is the largest city in the territory of Latvia.

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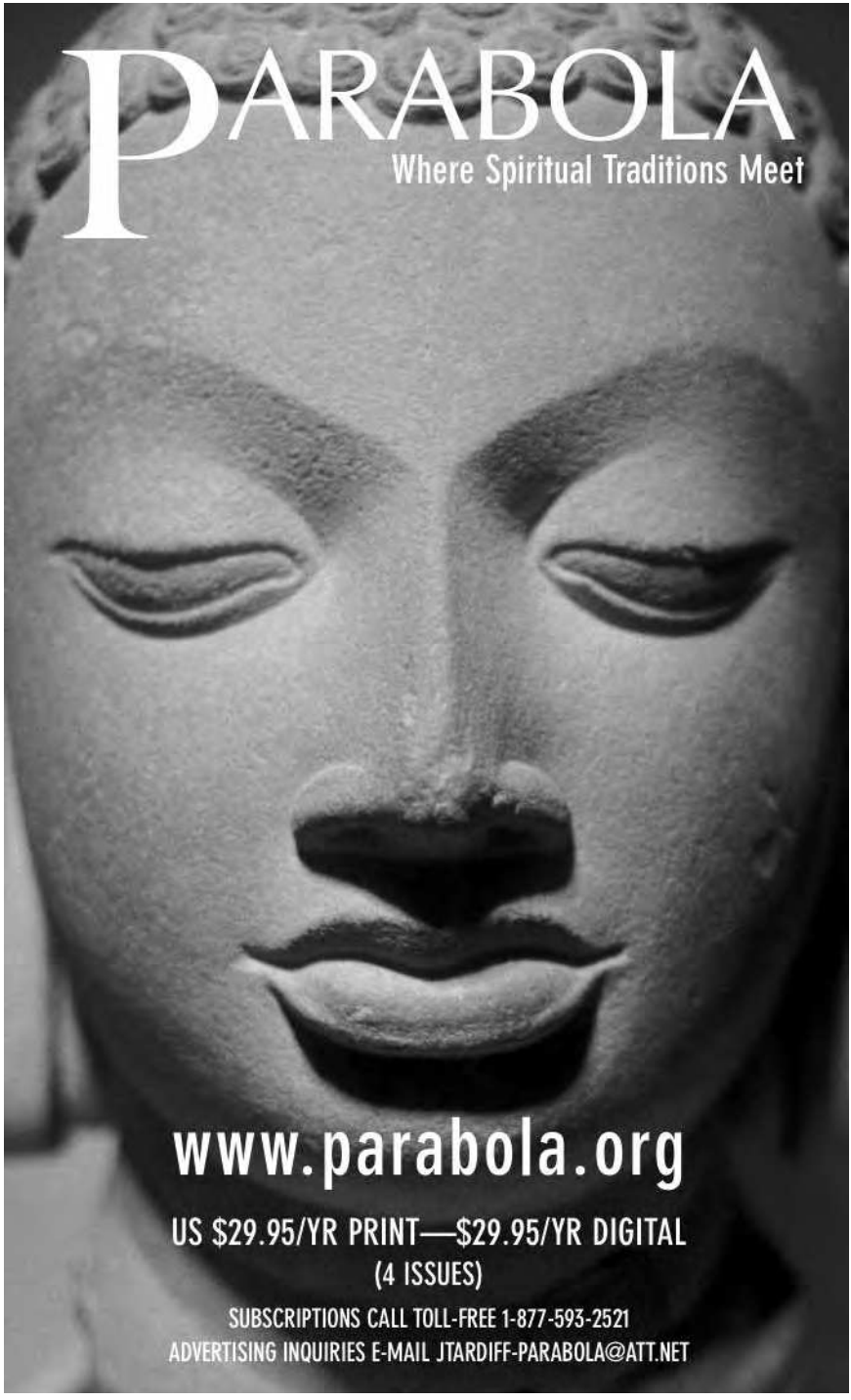
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